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Viewing cable 09MANAGUA1137, OPPOSITION UNITY TALKS CONTINUE - ARNOLDO ALEMAN REMAINS KEY

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09MANAGUA1137**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09MANAGUA1137	2009-12-11 16:14	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION UNITY TALKS CONTINUE - ARNOLDO ALEMAN REMAINS KEY

REF: A) STATE 124850; B) MANAGUA 1103

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Callahan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary. In a December 3 meeting, a group of prominent Nicaraguan business and political leaders reported to the Ambassador on their efforts to promote opposition unity. The group, several of whom had traveled to Washington the week before for a talk at the Inter American Dialogue and for meetings with the Department, believe the opportunity for Liberal, and broader opposition, unity is greater than ever before. However, unity continues to hinge on the participation of ex-President Arnaldo Aleman and his Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). The group urged the USG to reconsider its relationship with Aleman in order to improve the chances for unity and to reduce the risk that Aleman will form another "pacto" with Ortega. Ambassador responded that the USG is prepared to work with all those interested in preserving democracy in Nicaragua, including Aleman, but would need to see credible and concrete evidence of action on the part of Aleman and the PLC before a reciprocal response by the USG could be expected. End Summary.

12. (C) On December 3, Ambassador met with Antonio Lacayo, former Minister of the Presidency under Violetta Chamorro, Roger Arteaga, businessman and President of the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM), Cesar Zamora, past President of AMCHAM, Arturo Cruz, former Nicaraguan Ambassador to the U.S., Noel Vidaurre, Conservative Party leader and former Presidential Candidate, and Eduardo Montealegre, Liberal opposition leader and 2006 Presidential candidate, to discuss ongoing opposition unity efforts. The group recently returned from a November 24 presentation on Nicaragua at the Inter-American Dialogue and from meetings with senior officials at the Department (ref a). The group has been working for the last several months to bring opposition groups, civil society, and the business community together to confront President Daniel Ortega, preserve democratic space, and form a united bloc to challenge Ortega and/or the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the 2011 national elections.

13. (C) Lacayo believes the chances for opposition unity are better than ever, following the successful November 21 opposition march and other recent setbacks for Ortega domestically and internationally (ref b). The march showed that the opposition political parties and civil society can work together successfully, turning out participation far greater than had been expected in spite of all the difficulties and harassment by the Ortega

government. Fear, he said, had been broken. Lacayo called the previous two weeks the "worst of Ortega's presidency," noting the strong turnout by the opposition, the successful efforts of Nicaraguan National Police Chief Aminta Granera to preserve public order and facilitate the march (despite explicit pressure from Ortega not to do so), and the selection of Julio Cesar Aviles (whom Ortega opposed) to be the next Chief of the Nicaraguan Armed Forces. These three events, according to Lacayo, were clear losses for Ortega and showed what the opposition and key institutions can achieve if they remain firm.

WHERE IS ALEMAN AND WHAT DOES HE WANT?

¶4. (C) Montealegre lamented the decision by the PLC not to oppose the 2010 budget and fiscal reform package submitted by the FSLN, in which the PLC largely abstained from voting and some PLC Deputies cast deciding votes to facilitate its rapid passage as well as the passage of key amendments (septel). According to Montealegre, these votes show that Aleman has not yet firmly committed to being in the opposition. "He wants to be in the opposition, but is not yet prepared to pay the price of separating from Ortega," Montealegre commented in reference to the "pacto" power-sharing agreement between Aleman and Ortega.

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¶5. (C) Lacayo and the group believe that the opposition cannot win without Aleman and the PLC and that the PLC finally recognizes it cannot win without the rest of the opposition. The PLC's votes in the National Assembly are necessary for the opposition to be able to propose and vote on new members for key government institutions, including the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ), the Comptroller's Office, and other positions. Only with a united block of Deputies that includes the PLC can the opposition force the FSLN's hand and take control of these institutions. Montealegre also acknowledged that of all the opposition parties involved in the unity effort, only the PLC is viable to compete in the 2011 elections. (Note: Montealegre's Vamos con Eduardo/Independent Liberal Party (PLI) remains hobbled by internal problems and legal challenges and both the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) and Conservative Party (PC) remain banned.) In the unity discussions, Aleman has been using the PLC's strong legal position to press Montealegre and other leaders to commit early in 2010 to a "primary" system to select the presidential candidate for 2011.

¶6. (C) Montealegre noted that the Liberals continue to make progress on uniting their collective forces through a dialogue mediated by Esteli Bishop Abelardo Mata. In the group's meeting on December 2, the PLC, Montealegre's Liberals (Vamos con Eduardo and the Independent Liberal Party), and the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), which holds five Deputy positions in the National Assembly, agreed to block elections to the aforementioned government institutions through March 14, to allow more time to achieve Liberal unity. According to Montealegre, this was significant as Aleman had been previously unwilling to commit to blocking votes on all of these positions and had been pressing for an agreement before the end of 2009 to hold primaries.

¶7. (C) Cruz and Vidaurre acknowledge that Aleman believes he can be the opposition candidate for 2011, though they expressed doubts that the opposition could hold together under his candidacy or that he could win a general election. According to Cruz, Aleman's popularity among the Liberal base has risen over the course of 2009 but not enough to overcome likely massive abstention among the general electorate in a head to head race against Ortega. The key, therefore, is to continue to draw Aleman into a closer and stronger

relationship with the rest of the opposition so that he cannot break away once it becomes clear he cannot be the candidate in 2011.

RENEWING A USG-ALEMAN RELATIONSHIP?

18. (C) The group argued that greater incentives are needed to draw Aleman further into the opposition camp and make it politically impossible for him to renew his "pacto" with Ortega. The group has supported the efforts negotiated by Mata, as well as broader unity efforts that bring together the business community, civil society and other smaller political parties. They remained concerned, however, that Aleman could break from the unity efforts if he does not believe his long-term interests will be protected or advanced in the unity coalition. When pressed, Lacayo and Cruz believe that Aleman is primarily interested in retaining control over his political party, protecting himself from further criminal prosecution, and securing long-term protection and stability for his family. In a subsequent conversation, PLC Deputy and Aleman confidante Oscar Moncada confirmed to us that these are Aleman's primary personal objectives. In light of this concern, Lacayo urged the USG to reconsider its relationship with Aleman and his family. In particular, they urged that visas be restored to his family members and that the USG (the Embassy) enter a direct relationship with Aleman. Lacayo believes a meeting with Aleman

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would help secure the PLC's place in the opposition coalition and provide strong disincentives for Aleman to again negotiate directly with Ortega.

19. (C) Ambassador noted that the PLC, and Aleman in particular, have failed to respect their public and private commitments making it difficult to believe that they will honor these current commitments either. In December 2008 and January 2009, despite multiple pledges to defend the rightful winners of the November 2008 municipal elections and to form a democratic-leaning National Assembly, the PLC switched sides and joined with the FSLN to divide up control and to exclude Montealegre and other non-PLC opposition members. The December 4 vote on the budget and fiscal reform package was just one more incident in the long history of Aleman and PLC pledging to support democracy and the opposition, while forming their own agreement with the FSLN on the side, that made it difficult to take Aleman's recent pledges seriously.

110. (C) Nonetheless, the Ambassador noted, the USG remained interested in meeting with and working with all groups that are interested in preserving democracy in Nicaragua. If Aleman and the PLC were committed to unity and took verifiable and irrevocable steps to support democracy, including changes in the CSE that would lead to more democratic elections in 2011, we could be prepared to consider changes in the relationship with Aleman and other senior leadership within the PLC, including a meeting with Aleman at a future date. The burden, however, would be on the PLC to demonstrate its commitment. Commitment would be measured in deeds, not words ("obras y no palabras," in Spanish, was a key campaign slogan and governing theme of Aleman's administration).

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The opposition is correct that they cannot win in 2011, or make the necessary changes to the election law and other institutions like the CSE that are needed to be able to compete in fair elections, without Aleman and the PLC. At the same time, the polls remain clear that Aleman is one of the most despised public figures in the country and his candidacy at the top of a "unity" ticket would likely divide the opposition further, increase political apathy and voter abstention, and weaken Nicaragua's increasingly fragile democracy. In fact, in a recent lunch with the MRS leadership, they told us that never, under any circumstance, could they support Aleman as the opposition leader. We have maintained our position that the terms for opposition unity are something for Nicaraguans, not the USG, to decide, and all parties, from Eduardo Montealegre, to the MRS, to the PLC have welcomed this position and believe it has contributed to the ongoing efforts to foster unity. To that end, the request to consider changing our relationship with Aleman and the PLC bears serious consideration and may prove useful to coalition-building efforts. At the same time, Aleman and senior PLC leaders have previously shown their unwillingness or inability to commit to breaking their current relationship with Ortega and the FSLN, so caution is in order. We will provide septel a proposed series of benchmarks on which to monitor PLC commitment towards fostering opposition unity and preserving democracy that could be matched with steps on the USG side to change our relations with the PLC, including Aleman personally.

CALLAHAN